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C O N F I D E N T I A L CARACAS 003929

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TAGS: PGOV PHUM KDEM VE
SUBJECT: MEETING WITH TUPAMAROS WORKING IN CARACAS
GOVERNMENT

Classified By: Mark Wells, Acting Political Counselor,
for Reason 1.4(b).

Summary

¶1. (C) Alberto "Chino" Carias, a member of the urban guerrilla group Tupamaros (now a political party) and now a public security official for the Caracas metropolitan district, discussed with poloff December 21 the re-structuring the Metropolitan Police and the December 8 street vendor riot in downtown Caracas. Carias described his "constant" contact with Tupamaros and other groups in other countries, while denying any direct contact with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). He predicted a calm political scenario for 2005, though a fellow Tupamaro warned that the "terrorists" in the radical opposition would be dealt with harshly. End Summary.

Tupamaros in Charge

¶2. (C) Poloff had lunch on December 21 with Alberto "Chino" Carias, a member of the Tupamaro urban guerrilla group that registered as a political party this year. Fellow Tupamaro Oswaldo Rivero also attended. Carias said he, like many early Tupamaros, was once a member of former guerrilla movement and now political party Bandera Roja, but joined the Tupamaros when Uruguayan exiles of the original group sought refuge in Caracas in the 1970s. Carias acknowledged press reports that he tried to blow up a church in 1978 but denied responsibility for the 1979 killing of a policeman, for which Carias was imprisoned. He described the Tupamaros as having functioned as a vigilante street gang in poor Caracas neighborhoods in the 80's and 90's in the absence of competent police forces. Carias said the Tupamaros aided Chavez's 1992 coup by forcefully clearing areas around the Miraflores presidential palace to facilitate movement by dissident military units. During the Chavez administration, the Tupamaros surfaced as Chavez supporters who occasionally engaged in violent street protests against opposition targets, at times led personally by Carias. Carias led a protest at the Embassy in 2003 against U.S. interventionism; despite his boasts that there are more than 3,000 Tupamaros, only 17 showed for the event.

¶3. (C) Carias made headlines recently, including in the Miami Herald, when in November he joined the administration of newly elected Metropolitan Caracas Mayor Juan Barreto as Sub-Secretary for Citizen Security. Carias, who was Barreto's aide in the National Assembly prior to Barreto's election as mayor, said he joined the mayor's office to help re-structure the Metropolitan Police (PM) and serve as a political adviser. Carias said his decision to join the Caracas district government caused six Tupamaro leaders to quit on the grounds the group risked losing its objectivity as an independent Chavez ally. Carias noted that he is not a police officer but is usually armed and accompanied by bodyguards. (Note: The mayor's Office of Citizen Security has oversight for the Metropolitan Police and is headed by Reynaldo Garcia, Carias' boss and an alternate deputy in the National Assembly for Chavez's Fifth Republic Movement. Active duty National Guard General Manuel Escalona is the chief of the Metropolitan Police. The Caracas metropolitan mayor has coordinating responsibilities for the five municipalities of the district and their respective police forces.

Reorganizing the Metropolitan Police

¶4. (C) Carias is leaning a commission to re-structure the Metropolitan Police and improve its image among Caracas residents. Carias said the first steps of the commission were to replace the head of the PM's elite brigade and two other zone commanders who he said were involved in organized crime. He noted that one of the replacement commanders is an

opposition member ("escualido") but is a respected officer. The commission has also made changes to police cadet training, Carias added. Carias told poloff previously the

commission is planning to introduce "social intelligence," whereby citizens can report on the misdeeds of police officers.

Tupamaros Mediate Fireworks Riot

15. (C) Carias blamed the December 8 riot in downtown Caracas that left 52 injured on police from the Libertador Municipality (Policaracas). Carias said the police stole the traditional Christmas fireworks from street vendors, who reacted by burning buses and attacking police. Rivero said the police used only non-lethal force such as tear gas and rubber bullets. He said the fighting deteriorated into shootings between rival street vendor associations. Carias claimed he was forced to step in and mediate a solution between Policaracas, municipality officials, and the street vendors. Carias said his office is developing a plan for managing the street vendors that is due out in January.

Repression of the Opposition

16. (C) Carias denied his appointment portends a crackdown on the political opposition. He said the coming year would be peaceful. Rivero added, however, that the GOV would deal harshly with "terrorists" of the opposition that plant bombs or conspire to commit violence. Asked if that included peaceful marches and demonstrations, Rivero said no, that they encourage peaceful protests. Rivero said he considered the most radical and dangerous sectors of the opposition to be Primero Justicia and Bandera Roja, which he asserted are armed. Carias had told poloff some weeks before that, under the administration of opposition Mayor Alfredo Pena, the PM used armed patrols to clear the way for opposition marches, a practice Carias considered to show political bias.

Foreign Contacts

17. (C) Carias said he is in "constant communication" with groups bearing the Tupamaro name and other radical groups in Latin American countries, mentioning he had spoken that day with colleagues in Peru and Nicaragua. Asked about the Armed Revolutionary Forces of Colombia (FARC), Carias denied he speaks with them, saying "FARC is really messed up." He added, however, that he would not tell poloff about inner workings of the FARC in the same way poloff would not talk about how other USG agencies work. Carias claimed the recent capture of FARC international leader Rodrigo Granda occurred in Caracas and not in Colombia as early press reports had it, asserting that Granda had been detained in a Caracas hotel (Note: December 23 stories in mainstream Caracas newspapers appear to support Carias' version.)

Comment

18. (C) Carias is a street thug and hustler with a penchant for self-promotion and exaggeration. It seems unlikely the Tupamaros have a coordinated international network as Carias implied. They have, however, found allies in the GOV, notably Chavez and Barreto, who have in the past deployed these irregular street fighters when the political situation required it. Politically, Carias is intent on stripping the opposition of critical PM street protection should the era of mass marches against the GOV return. Carias and company have a broad influence in the Metropolitan Police, but the placement of a National Guard colonel as the police chief may be a recognition that the PM needs some measure of organization and discipline. The fireworks riot is a reminder that the GOV, despite enjoying the support of the local authorities and a majority of street vendors, still face governance challenges among its constituencies.

McFarland

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